Grace Peterson Nursing Research Colloquium

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Addressing the High Rates of Infant Mortality in the African American Population: An Integrative Literature Review

Faith Frangenberg
faith.d.frangenberg@gmail.com

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**Addressing the High Rates of Infant Mortality in the African American Population**

**An Integrative Literature Review**

**Background:**
Infant mortality disproportionately affects the African American community. Although the overall infant mortality rate in the United States has declined over the past few decades, the infant mortality rate in the African American community has declined at a slower speed than in the Caucasian community (Oklahoma County Strategic Plan, 2016). The rate of infant mortality per 1,000 live births in the African American community nationwide is 11.4 compared to 4.9 in non-Hispanic whites (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Additionally, African American infants have 3.2 times the probability of death due to conditions associated with low birth weight as compared to non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2017). In 2014, African American infants had 2.2 times the risk of sudden infant death syndrome compared to non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2017). African Americans are considered a vulnerable population, which means health conditions experienced by this population may be worsened by insufficient access to healthcare (Waisel, 2013).

**Research Question:**
What are the risk factors on which the nursing profession can educate the African American population to decrease the high rate of infant mortality?

**Conceptual Framework**

**The Tannahill Model:**
This model for health promotion consists of three overlapping components: disease prevention, health protection, and health education (Tannahill, 2008). Disease prevention involves risk factor identification, health protection targeting policy and legislation and lastly, health education that can increase knowledge on how to decrease risk factors (Raingerub, 2017).

**Methods:**
The following databases were searched: Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL) Complete and Medline via PubMed. In CINAHL Complete, the keywords “African American” and “infant mortality” were searched and the results were refined by the major headings of “blacks” and “infant mortality.” The results were then further narrowed by limiting the publication dates to between 2008 and 2018 and the language filter was set to English, which ultimately returned 21 results.

**Inclusion criteria:** Sources were limited to articles published between 2008 and 2018. Articles were required to be peer-reviewed and available in English. In addition, articles were required to discuss risk factors related to the high infant mortality rate within the African American population and/or potential mitigating factors.

**Exclusion criteria:** Articles which failed to discuss the risk factors related to the high infant mortality rate in the African American community and/or potential mitigating factors were excluded, as identification of the relevant risk factors and potential mitigating factors was necessary in order to answer the research question.

**Results & Discussion:**
In the eleven studies analyzed for this literature review, many risk factors were identified as contributing to the high infant mortality rate in the African American community. However, these risk factors fell under six major themes: (1) culture and race, (2) environment, (3) illness and specific diseases, (4) preterm birth and low birthweight, (5) sociocultural determinants and socioeconomic status, and (6) stress.

This literature review demonstrates the immense complexity of this issue. Cultural factors, such as a lack of cultural awareness, contribute to inadequate education of American American women. Racism, specifically institutional racism, is demonstrated in the social, economic, and healthcare inequities that African Americans face. These inequities factor into the higher infant mortality rate faced by African Americans. Illness and specific diseases within the African American community also give rise to African Americans’ higher infant mortality rate. Preterm birth and low birthweight is significantly higher among African Americans than other ethnic groups. Socioeconomic status and social determinants, which includes the environment in which African Americans live (neighborhoods, housing, and workplaces), as well as access to healthcare, adequate nutrition, income, and education influences the infant mortality rate substantially. Finally, to the extent possible, stress reduction is important to reducing the African American infant mortality rate.

**Nursing Practice Implications:**
The nursing profession should focus on educating African Americans regarding the higher infant mortality rate and its contributing factors using culturally relevant methods. Teaching must give African American women a voice and empower them to advocate for themselves. This population must be supplied with the necessary knowledge and resources to assist them in mitigating or reducing the risk factors underlying the higher infant mortality rate in the African American community. At this time, further research is needed to determine best nursing practices for reducing the infant mortality rate in the African American community.